

## **KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

### **STAFF NOTE**

#### **Action/Discussion Item:**

Norm-Referenced Test Issues

#### **Applicable Statute or Regulation:**

KRS 158.6453, 703 KAR 5:020

#### **Action Question:**

Should the Kentucky Board of Education approve the policy recommendations to:

- replace the current norm-referenced test (NRT) at grade 9 with diagnostic/predictive tests at grades 8 and 10;
- eliminate the norm-referenced test at the end-of-primary (grade 3), except for those used to aid in the identification of Gifted and Talented students, which would be provided to local districts at no cost, at least in the short term;
- move the norm-referenced test given in grade 6 from the spring to the fall to provide a national comparison as students move from elementary to middle school;
- assess language mechanics by utilizing on-demand writing (multiple choice items and analytically-scored writing response) at grades 5 and 8, the reading/language arts portion of the NRT at grade 6, and the English portion of the diagnostic/predictive tests at grades 8 and 10; and
- bring forward the necessary regulation amendments to a future meeting to make the policies legally effective for the tests given in 2007 and beyond and to specify those elements that are to be part of accountability?

#### **History/Background:**

***Existing Policy.*** Pursuant to KRS 158.6453, the assessment program shall include *a customized or commercially available norm-referenced test that measures, to the extent possible, the core content for assessment.* KBE has the flexibility to stipulate the number of grades, content areas and specific tests to be administered through regulation and currently designates that NRTs be administered at the end of primary (grade 3) and grades 6 and 9 in reading/language arts and mathematics.

The Request for Proposals (RFP) for the 2007 and beyond assessment released in August 2005 continues the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) and includes:

- ✓ Kentucky Core Content Test (KCCT) in reading, mathematics, science, social studies, arts & humanities, practical living/vocational studies, writing (writing on-demand and writing portfolio), and alternate portfolio as well as the expansion of reading and

mathematics to include all grades 3 through 8, as required by *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*.

- ✓ Norm-referenced test (NRT) in reading/language arts and mathematics at end-of-primary (grade 3), grade 6 and grade 9.
- ✓ Diagnostic/predictive measurement of high school/college readiness at grades 8 and 10.
- ✓ Independent research, quality assurance and validity studies that shall include a review of the accuracy of test scores and classifications assigned to students and schools.

During the negotiation process with the vendors, staff engaged in conversations with the National Technical Panel on Assessment and Accountability (NTAPAA) and gleaned additional information from vendors. Several important issues arose during these discussions that pointed toward some redundancies in the assessment design, especially with regard to the NRT and the diagnostic/predictive assessments, since both provide norms based on nationally representative samples.

*Grade 9:* Through the assessment RFP process, Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) staff was able to include an eighth grade measure to predict success in high school and a tenth grade measure to predict success in college, aiding in student choice of high school courses of study and identifying possible remediation needs. The “forward looking” philosophy of the diagnostic/predictive test seems to better meet student and school needs by encouraging students to think beyond the immediate and provide information to assist with instructional intervention rather than the focus on past learning provided by the NRT.

*Grade 6:* Currently, an NRT is given at the end of grade 6. Staff is recommending that the NRT be retained at grade 6 but moved to the fall in order to give a snapshot of student achievement as students move from elementary to middle school. This snapshot would serve to provide schools, districts and parents with national comparisons at this point in a student's educational progression and would also provide the middle school with student information at the beginning of the sixth grade. Principals have communicated that giving the NRT in the fall of grade 6 is a desirable change for the aforementioned reasons.

*Grade 3:* Beginning in spring 2007, the NCLB requirement to test reading and mathematics annually in every grade 3-8 will be accomplished with the Kentucky Core Content Test (KCCT); thus, the third grade NRT in the fall is a measure of second grade learning and holds schools accountable for very young students while providing them with little usable information for modifying instruction beyond that which would be gleaned from the KCCT in the spring.

The KDE is aware that some districts have used the NRT at the third grade to aid in the identification of Gifted and Talented students. Staff has begun to talk about ways to support districts in this work and to possibly give them more choice in the specific test that they use in the identification process. In the short term, however, KDE is recommending to provide these NRTs at no cost for local identification purposes.

*Language mechanics:* The original RFP discussions focused on a measure of language mechanics from test questions in the NRT reading/language assessment at grades 3, 6 and 9. Isolation of assessment information regarding language mechanics can also be accomplished by

utilizing on-demand writing (multiple choice items and analytically-scored writing response) at grades 5 and 8, the reading/language arts NRT at grade 6, and the English portions of the diagnostic/predictive tests at grades 8 and 10.

If the Board approves the policy recommendations described above, then staff will need to bring forward the necessary regulation amendments to a future meeting in order to make the policies legally effective for the tests given in 2007 and beyond and to specify those elements that are to be part of accountability.

### **Staff Recommendations and Rationale:**

KDE staff recommends that the Board approve the policy recommendations to:

- replace the current norm-referenced test (NRT) at grade 9 with diagnostic/predictive tests at grades 8 and 10;
- eliminate the norm-referenced test at the end-of-primary (grade 3), except for those used to aid in the identification of Gifted and Talented students, which would be provided to local districts at no cost, at least in the short term;
- move the norm-referenced test given in grade 6 from the spring to the fall to provide a national comparison as students move from elementary to middle school;
- assess language mechanics by utilizing on-demand writing (multiple choice items and analytically-scored writing response) at grades 5 and 8, the reading/language arts NRT at grade 6, and the English portions of the diagnostic/predictive tests at grades 8 and 10; and
- bring forward the necessary regulation amendments to a future meeting to make the policies legally effective for the tests given in 2007 and beyond and to specify those elements that are to be part of accountability?

These policies will better meet student and school needs by giving information for instructional intervention.

A summary of the proposed CATS assessment design can be found on the attached chart.

### **Impact on Getting to Proficiency:**

The new test design beginning in 2007 for reading and mathematics at grades 3-8 uses a Kentucky Core Content Test that will provide a direct measure of Kentucky's *Core Content for Assessment*. Annual performance data for these content areas will assist schools and districts in making more data-driven decisions to reach the ultimate goal of proficiency for all.

### **Groups Consulted and Brief Summary of Responses:**

Recognizing the importance of the issues discussed and level of stakeholder interest in the outcomes, staff has in the past and continues to obtain information from the National Technical Panel on Assessment and Accountability (NTAPAA) and the School Curriculum, Assessment and Accountability Council (SCAAC). Input from the groups will be reported at the April

meeting. Additionally, Dr. John Poggio from NTAPAA will be present via phone during this discussion to answer questions and offer advice.

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**Deputy Commissioner**

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**Commissioner of Education**

**Date:**

April 2006